

Hatching and Rearing Ringnecked Pheasants



MALE RINGNECKED PHEASANT IN FLIGHT
(Produced through the courtesy of Gaybird Pheasant Farm,
Great Missenden, Bucks, England)

BULLETIN NO. 13

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FOREWORD

So much interest has been taken by the sportsmen and farmers of the State in the ringneck pheasant that each Spring the Commission receives hundreds of requests for eggs for hatching purposes.

In years past eggs have been distributed to those interested in this work, such eggs being purchased from Game Funds at \$20.00 to \$30.00 per hundred. With the advent of the State Game Farms, pheasant eggs will be produced at a cost much lower than they may be purchased from private breeders, and in such quantities that it is hoped all requests for eggs may be filled.

While the Game Farms are of course limited to the number of birds that might successfully be produced, the possibilities of such production on the part of sportsmen and farmers from eggs furnished from these farms, is practically unlimited. It is to be hoped that interest in propagating this bird will continue. With the production of the Game Farms and Game Refuges, combined with that of Sportsmens Associations and individuals, Pennsylvania should soon be recognized as a good ringneck pheasant State, with an increase in the present daily and season bag limit.

Some of those who have secured eggs have had remarkable success, while others have made complete failures. It is felt the successful ones have complied with instructions and information furnished them by the Commission, and that disregard of such instructions has been responsible for the failures.



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Hatching and Rearing Ringnecked Pheasants

Compiled by

Charles A. Hiller

In Charge of Propagation

The instructions and information contained in the following pages are the result of Pennsylvania's experience and the study of systems as followed by others.

EGGS

Eggs furnished by the Game Commission are invariably shipped within twenty-four hours of their collection, and such collections are made three or four times a day.

Since it is not always possible to ship eggs when the applicant is ready for them, the eggs when received must be taken care of until they are set. Place the eggs in a tray or other suitable container wherein you have placed sawdust or bran, **but do not stand on end**. If eggs are placed on end there is danger of the air space or air chamber at the butt or large end of the egg being broken and egg will fail to hatch. Turn the eggs each day until set. Eggs should be held from twelve to twenty-four hours before being set and kept in a cool place of even temperature, such as a cellar, and a setting hen secured as soon as possible, and eggs not kept longer than one week before setting.

SETTING EGGS

Do not attempt to hatch pheasant eggs in an incubator. The inexperienced, and very often the experienced, pheasant breeder will run into many kinds of troubles after the birds are hatched. Use hens, and if possible bantams since they are less likely to break the eggs going to and from the nest or to crush the young birds by stepping on them. However, very good results are obtained in using the larger chickens and you will be able to set more eggs under them than could be set under a bantam. According to the size of the hen, fifteen to eighteen eggs may be placed in a nest.

Before setting the hen make sure she is ready to hatch. This can be done by allowing her to set on china or other artificial eggs, or on hard boiled chicken eggs. If the broody hen you desire to set must be removed from another place to where it is desired to set her, move her at night and place her in the nest you have already prepared for your pheasant eggs.

THE NEST

There are several methods which may be used in the preparation of the nests. Two of these methods will be described here, namely the hatching box and hatching coop.

The hatching box (See Figure 1) is a series of six nests so constructed that they may be built up into a tier of five sections providing thirty nests. You will note that there is no bottom placed in these boxes, the top of the lower box serving as the bottom of the upper. In preparing the nest in this box, cut a piece of sod or turf to fit, shaping this so as to form a hollow in the center in such manner that the eggs will be inclined to roll toward the center of the nest. The proper shape of the nest will be secured by removing the soil from the bottom of the sod. Proper shape may also be given to the nest by placing sand or dirt in corners of nest before placing the sod in the nest. Sod is used because it will retain moisture. If sod is not available fine hay, dry grass or similar material may be used but this kind of nest must be compact to prevent the eggs from sifting through, thus preventing incubation.

If only one nest box is used, place the box on ground or grass without attempting to provide a bottom.

In using the hatching boxes the hen is of course forcibly confined in the nest and should be removed from the nest once a day. By building a small pen the same length as the series of hatching boxes, about four feet wide and fifteen inches high, covered with poultry netting with a removable board on top the length of the pen and ten or twelve inches wide, the hens may be placed in same to feed and water. The hen may remain in this pen ten or fifteen minutes depending on the temperature at the time. Allow the hens to leave this pen by removing the board on top and permit them to go in the nest of their own accord. You need not worry about the hens getting back on their respective nests. Some hens develop more body heat than others and permitting them to change nests will result in a more uniform hatch. Even if these nests are built in a tier of five, you will find the hens will fly into the nests. As they enter the nests the door may be closed and when all hens are back on the nests you should check each one.

In using the hatching coop (See Figure 2) the nest is built right on the ground as the coop has no bottom. While any type of coop may be used, it is suggested that you construct a specially built coop, especially if you intend to continue ringneck pheasant propagation. The front is provided with four slats equally spaced, one of the slats is removable in order that the hen may be removed and placed in an exercising pen. The top of the coop should be made of matched lumber, hinged at the front of the coop and a hook fastener in the rear

to prevent wind storms or dogs tearing it off. The exercising pen (See Figure 3) which accompanies this is covered with $\frac{1}{2}$ " mesh wire cloth on two sides and one end. The open end should be placed against the front of the coop permitting the young pheasants to go to and from the coop. By removing a slat in the coop the hen may also have access to this exercising pen although it is thought best to confine her to the coop, since very often in scratching she will kill the young birds.

An exercising pen for the young birds may also be made by taking a length of one inch mesh wire, one foot wide and four or five feet in length, tacking one end to the coop and bringing the other end around to be tacked on the other front end of coop. This wire will then be in a semi-circle in front of the coop.

It will be noted that after the birds are hatched, the hatching coop becomes the rearing coop to confine the hen. Since the rearing coop and exercising pen must be available regardless of the system of nests used it is suggested you follow this latter plan. After the chicks have had the run of the exercising pen for three or four days and have learned the call of the hen, the exercising pen can be removed and the chicks given a free run.

CARE DURING INCUBATION

It is very important to dust the hen thoroughly with good insect powder. Dust well under the wings and around the tail feathers. Persian insect powder is one of the best powders for this use and can be purchased at most any drug store. It is also well to dust the nest and the corners of the coop. Many of your pheasants will be lost if this precaution is not taken. **However, no dusting should be done after the eighteenth day.** It is suggested the hen be confined during the entire period of incubation and removed once a day placing her in the exercising pen where food and water have been provided. Some hens will refuse to leave the nest of their own accord and will often die from starvation. By having a regular time for removing the hens you will overcome this trouble.

While the hen is off the nest you will have time to rearrange the eggs, washing off the dirty eggs with luke warm water, but do not use soap. Any broken eggs should of course be removed as well as any other refuse that might accumulate.

Pheasant eggs are very small and require considerable moisture during incubation. This is one reason why the nest should be built on the ground. It is well to sprinkle the nest and eggs with luke warm water a few days before hatching, as this will enable the chicks to peck through the shell easier. In very dry weather it is also advisable to sprinkle the ground around the coop.

allowed the run of the exercising pen, but keep the hen in the coop. Within another 48 hours the chicks will have learned the call of the hen and should you desire, the exercising pen may be removed allowing the chicks to run at large.

FEEDING

Young pheasants should not be fed or watered for the first 36 hours. After that period and for the first three weeks the young birds may be fed hard boiled eggs, (boiled 15 minutes) chopped fine and mixed with unsalted cracker dust or stale bread which has been thoroughly dried in an oven and crumbed very fine. The egg, after being chopped, should also be passed through a fine sieve.

At the end of the third week the above ration may be decreased and chic-grain added. However, in changing the feed always do it gradually. By the end of the fifth week the feed used for the first three weeks may be eliminated and at the beginning of the sixth week intermediate scratch feeds may be given.

Just as soon as grains are given the birds fine grit should be available.

Young pheasants may go for a long time without water if they are reared in a clover or grass field where they will get sufficient moisture from the greens. Water may be given to the young birds when a week old or immediately following a rain.

The birds may be fed four times a day for the first four weeks gradually cutting down to two feeds a day after six weeks. Never give more than the birds are able to clean up in a short time, and feed on a clean board or pan. Always give fresh feed as sour feed will lead to serious trouble.

When grains are given, a little fine charcoal should be added at intervals.

Cottage cheese made from skim milk is often used with good results. This may be added to the feed whenever desired.

Young pheasants will always do better where the supply of insects is good.

If no greens are available the young birds should be supplied with crisp lettuce or celery leaves. At about six or eight weeks of age, onion tops may be given.

An egg custard, using strictly fresh eggs, may be used in lieu of the hard boiled egg.

About the only feed required for the hen during incubation is whole corn. Grit and water should of course be available. Water should be placed so as to be available to the hen only, thus the young pheasants will not get water until they are several days old. A tin cup hung high on the inside of the coop is sufficient.

SURFACED MATERIAL		
Door 1 Piece $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 11\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0''$ 1 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0'' \times 3\frac{1}{2}''$	Front 1 Piece $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 9\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0''$ 1 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0'' \times 14''$	Roof 3 Pieces $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 10'' \times 32''$ Ploughed & Covered 2 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0'' \times 30''$ 2 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0'' \times 28''$
Sides & Back 2 Pieces $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 11\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0''$ 2 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2'-0'' \times 24''$ Triangular 1 = $15'' \times 11\frac{1}{2}'' \times 24''$ Door	Misc. Strips 1 Piece $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 15\frac{1}{2}'' \times 10\frac{1}{2}''$ 2 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 10\frac{1}{2}'' \times 19''$ 1 = $15'' \times 2\frac{1}{4}'' \times 24''$	Nests 2 Pieces $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 16''$ 2 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 18''$ 2 = $8\frac{1}{2}'' \times 3\frac{1}{2}'' \times 18''$

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PLAN OF
PHEASANT HATCHING COOPS

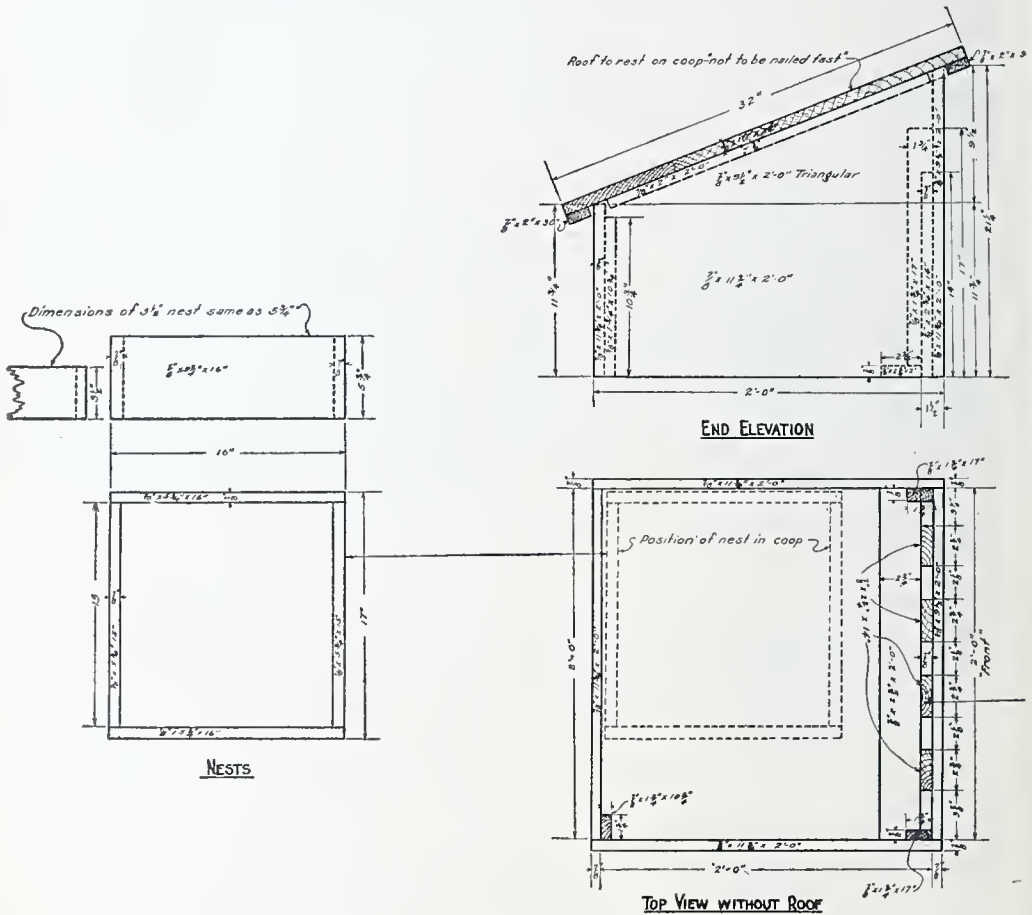


FIG. 2

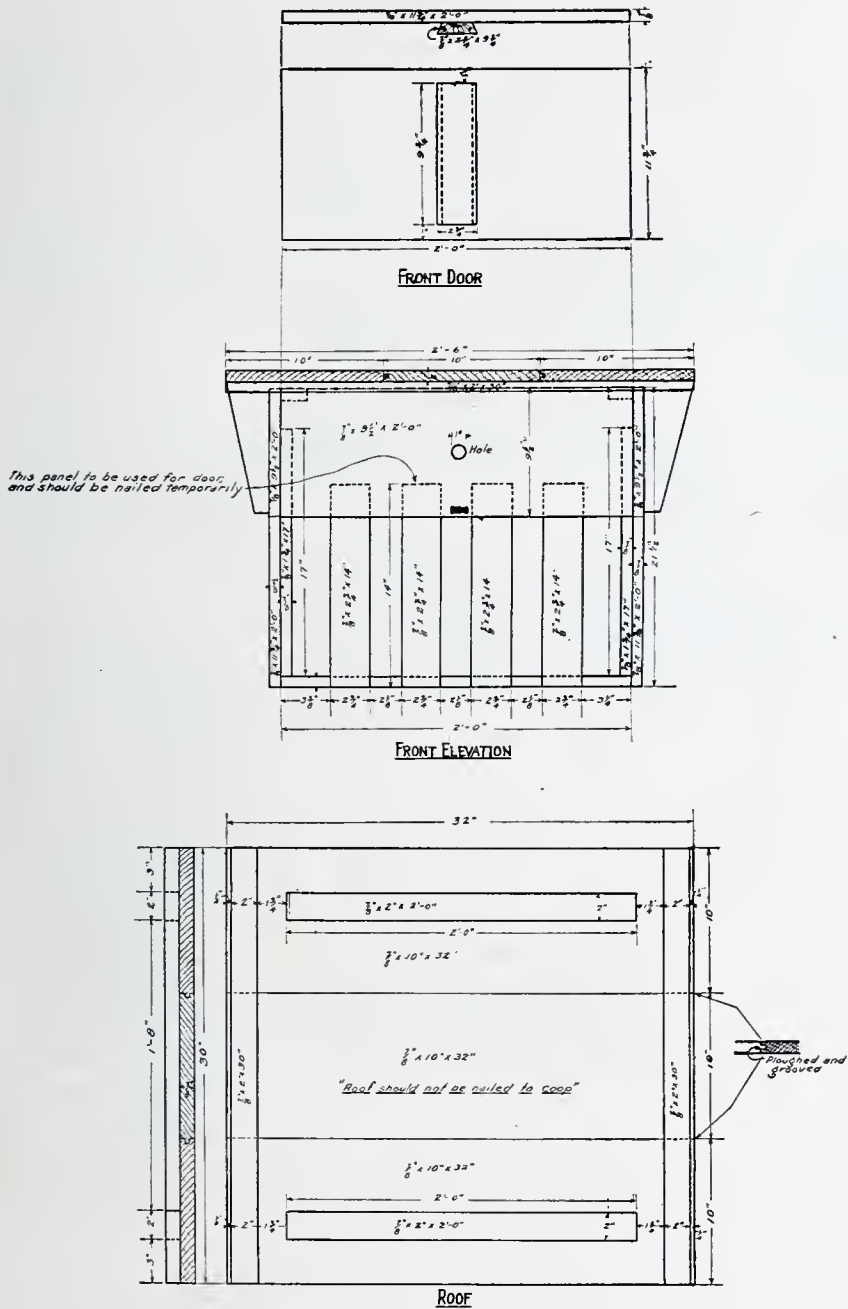


FIG. 2 (Continued)

REARING FIELD

If space permits you should select a site for a rearing field or plot, such as an orchard, or a good clover field, as the young pheasants will be able to secure much insect life at such places and will have plenty of cover from predatory birds. If a field or plot of this kind is available the coop and exercising pen may be moved to the new site when the chicks are 24 hours old.

In selecting a rearing field or plot give due care to the drainage so that heavy rains will not flood the nests or drown the chicks. Sanitary conditions of the field must also be given consideration. Where a number of coops are in operation it is well to place the coops about 50 feet apart, and if room permits they should be moved a few feet every day. It is well to mow a path through the rearing field to be used in going back and forth. Young pheasants will often hide in the grass and lie perfectly still when you approach them, so that if you must go to the coops through tall grass you are very apt to step on or kick the chicks. Grass that is six inches or more in height is preferable as a close cropped lawn is not suitable.

Each night the coops should be closed tight so that night prowling cats, dogs, weasels, etc., will be unable to gain an entrance. The coops should not be closed, however, until you are reasonably sure all the chicks have returned to the hen, and it is a good idea to re-check the rearing field or plot after the coops are closed to determine if any of the birds are wandering around.

Constant watch should be kept for dead chicks and these dead birds should be gathered up and examined in an attempt to determine cause of death. All of the dead chicks should be disposed of by burning.

RELEASING PHEASANTS

Young pheasants develop rapidly, and when six to eight weeks of age they will show a tendency to leave the hen and shift for themselves. In the program of propagation adopted by the Game Commission, which of necessity must differ from that of a private breeder, provision has of course been made to propagate ringnecked pheasants and release such pheasants to the best advantage for the sportsmen of the State and at the lowest possible cost.

It is earnestly believed that proper and satisfactory results may be obtained by releasing pheasants at an early age. The hen and her entire brood, when about four weeks of age, may be taken to the place already selected for the release of the young birds and where a coop or rough box previously has been placed, in which the hen may be confined for a few days. The hen may then be released to go with the young birds until they desert her.

In selecting the location for distribution of young birds, vermin,

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PLAN OF
PHEASANT REARING PEN

MATERIAL		
SIDES	SIDES (TOP)	BRACES (SIDES)
8 Pieces 2"x4"x7'-0"	2 Pieces 1"x6"x12'-0"	4 Pieces 1"x4"x8'-0"
2 " 1"x12"x12'-0"	2 " 1"x6"x16'-0"	3 " 1"x4"x9'-6"
2 " 1"x12"x14'-0"	1 " 1"x6"x12'-0"	1 " 1"x4"x8'-0"
4 " 1"x12"x16'-0"	2 " 1"x6"x8'-0"	
DOOR	BRACES (TOP)	NAILS
2 Pieces 1"x4"x4'-5 3/4"	4 Pieces 1"x4"x5'-6"	8 Penny
1 " 1"x4"x5'-0"		
2 " 1"x4"x11'-11 1/2"		
MISCELLANEOUS MATERIAL		
60 lin. ft. 1" mesh wire - 60" wide	6 - 6" Steel Strap Hinges.	
100 " " 2" " " 30" "	2 - 4"x4" Steel Bolts	

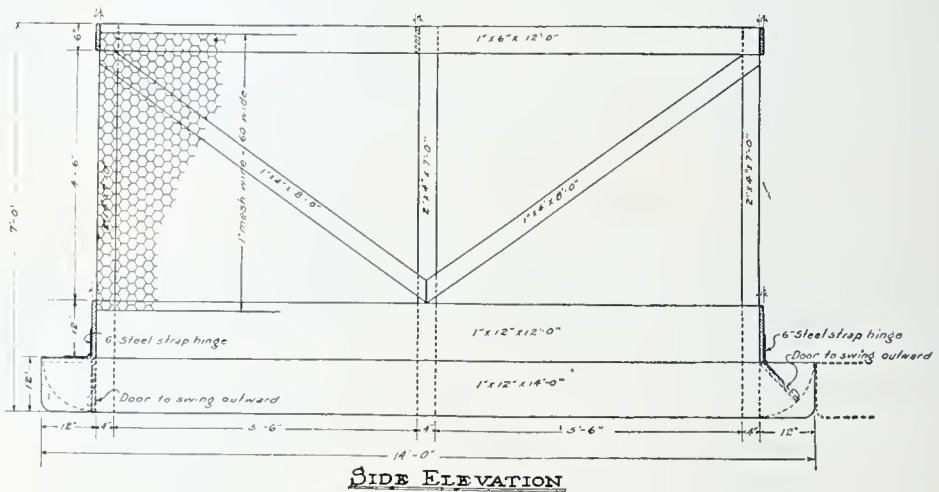


FIG. 4

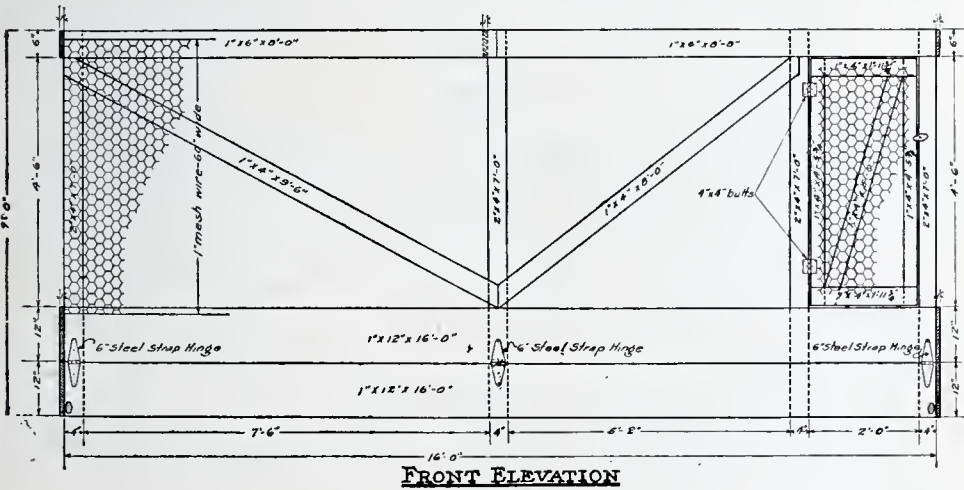
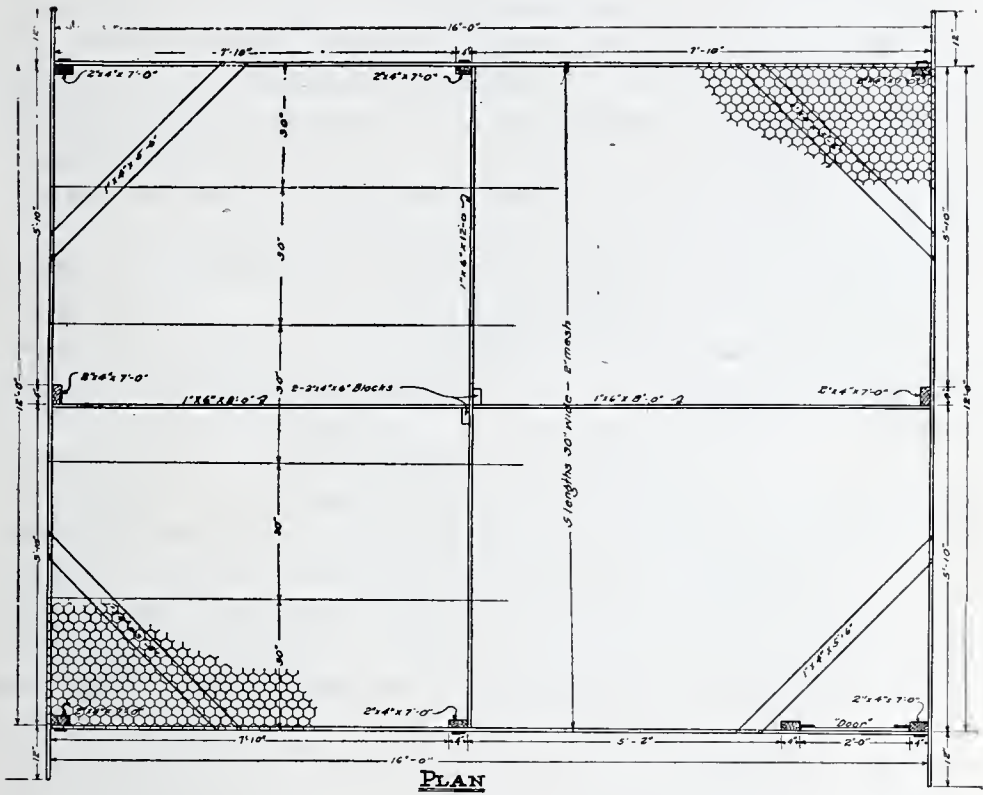


FIG. 4 (Continued)

food and cover conditions should be considered. Birds should not be released near barns or buildings where house cats or rats will find them. Good game cover should be available where the birds are able to go to secure shelter from predatory birds. Food conditions in the immediate section should be ideal, particularly insects, as well as a suitable supply of water. Abandoned farm lands, weed fields, old orchards provide the desired food conditions and protective cover. It is also well to select your point of release where a farmer or a member of his family will be sufficiently interested to care for the birds until they are able to shift for themselves.

When the birds no longer return to the coops they may be gathered up so they will be available next season.

In some instances no trace of the birds will be found after you have released them but you may rest assured they are in the neighborhood.

In accepting eggs from the Game Commission the applicant must understand he is rearing the birds for the benefit of the sportsmen of the State and not for any particular group of sportsmen. Inasmuch as the eggs are furnished from a fund contributed to by all the sportsmen it is only right that all should benefit. Therefore, in releasing the birds reared from such eggs, they should be released on lands open to general hunting, or on lands closed to all hunting. Those who desire to stock lands where limited hunting is permitted should not request the Game Commission to supply the means for such stocking.

While the Game Commission has found it impracticable to keep pheasants until they are fully matured, due to the expense of erecting suitable pens and the amount of labor which would be necessary as well as feed required, those who desire to hold their birds until the close of the hunting season and possibly over the winter, may do so. In no case, however, is it necessary to hold birds over the following breeding season. The Commission will be in position to fill requests for eggs and it is not necessary for the sportsmen or farmers to keep pens of pheasants for egg production.

The Game Commission's stock of breeders is being constantly changed thus assuring at all times suitable birds for both stocking purposes and egg production.

If the pheasants hatched and raised are held over winter before they are released, they should be released in sections where other pheasants may be found. By doing this the birds will inter-breed with the wild pheasants which, of course, is desired.

HOLDING MATURED PHEASANTS

Those organizations or others who desire to hold their birds over until the close of the hunting season or until weather conditions be-

come favorable should have available a sanitary holding pen. This pen should be of fairly good size, and cover on the inside of the pen should be furnished for the birds to hide under. Corn fodder or ever-green trees may be used to advantage. If the pen is exposed to the cold winter winds protection on the northern and western side may be given by leaning corn fodder against the sides of the pen so exposed. Figure 4 will give the detailed construction of either a rearing or holding pen.

In feeding birds in captivity it is recommended that if at all possible one person do all the feeding and that person approach the pen with a low whistle. This same practice should be followed in feeding the young pheasants or at any time when it is necessary to approach or go into pens or fields. By doing this the birds soon learn to recognize the attendant and the cause of his visits. It is sometimes possible to provide feed and water without the birds seeing the attendant. It is desirable to keep strangers away at all times.

In feeding matured birds the same rule relating to over-feeding of young birds should be followed. By close observation the correct amount of feed to be given at one time may be determined.

During the winter months insect life is not available and a substitute for such feed must be given. Any commercial meat scrap or meat seraps secured from the local butcher will suffice. When such feed is not given your birds may pick each other. This of course must be avoided but when it does occur such sore spots should be painted over with pine tar.

It is a good plan to place sheaves of wheat, kaffir corn, buckwheat, etc., in the pens for the birds to feed on as such feeding will also provide exercise.

DISEASES

Fortunately ringnecked pheasants are very resistant to disease likely brought about by their having been bred in captivity for so many years. Like domestic poultry they are practically immune to diseases which today are but a memory.

While many pheasants are lost yearly due to disease, such deaths are caused by neglect or carelessness. Perhaps the most common disease found in young pheasants is the gapes. The gapworm lodges in the wind pipe of young birds thus affecting the breathing and causing the birds to gap or yawn. This disease is readily cured through the use of Blackerite, or the birds affected may be placed in an air tight box and a handful of lime tossed in so that lime dust is made, this being breathed by the birds. Do not permit the birds to remain in this dust box too long or they will suffocate. They should be in the box just long enough to breath in the lime dust.

Leg cramp is another disease which is rather common among birds

kept on wet ground. The remedy is simple, move the birds to dry ground.

Sore eyes and bald heads are caused by over-exposure to strong sunlight.

White diarrhea is another fatal disease which may develop soon after the chicks are hatched and will cause many deaths if not controlled. Just as soon as the first symptoms of this disease is noticed add a little potassium permanganate to the drinking water, just enough to color the water a light purple. In fact a little of this chemical may be placed in the drinking water when diarrhea symptoms are not seen as it is a good disinfectant and preventive.

PROPAGATING LICENSE

Under the Act of May 24, 1923 those persons, associations or corporations desiring to breed or raise game animals or game birds of any kind for commercial purposes must first apply for and have issued to them a propagating license. The fee for this license is \$1.00 and the license period extends to May 31st next following date of issue. and at which time the license must be renewed if the licensee intends to continue his propagating activities.

A propagating license is not necessary when the game is intended for release in a wild state, sold to the Board of Game Commissioners, or for home consumption.

For raising small game the propagating premises may be so constructed as the licensee feels is best suited for the purpose, provided that wild game of any kind cannot enter such premises.

Game raised or eggs of game birds produced under authority of a propagating license may be sold, given away or shipped from the premises, or killed within the premises without regard to sex or numbers and time of year, provided:

That before any game raised or eggs produced under a propagating license are removed from the premises there should be attached to the crate or container used for shipment, or to the carcass of the animal or bird, a propagating tag.

PROPAGATING TAG

Propagating tags will be secured from the Executive Secretary of the Board at cost (four cents each).

These tags are composed of two parts. The upper part of tag properly filled out shall be attached to the crate or container, or bird or animal, and so remain until the game or eggs have been removed from the crate or container, or until the bird or animal has been disposed of, when the tag shall be removed and forwarded to the Game Commission immediately, said tag bearing the information called for.

It is not necessary to tag game or eggs when such game or birds

produced from such eggs are to be released within the State for stocking purposes, or when sold to the Board of Game Commissioners.

FANCY PHEASANTS

Inasmuch as golden, silver, amherst and reeves pheasants are not classed as game birds it is not necessary to secure a propagating license to raise or breed such birds regardless of the purpose. This also applies to any other bird or animal not classed as a game bird or game animal.

IMPORTING BIRDS OR ANIMALS

Before any live wild bird or wild animal may be introduced into this State for propagating purposes said bird or animal must be inspected by a representative of the Bureau of Animal Industry, State Department of Agriculture.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

DO NOT—

- feed young birds for 24 hours;
- water birds until a week old;
- allow the young birds to chill before they are dry;
- overfeed;
- set eggs before you have had them 24 hours;
- disturb the birds unnecessarily;
- molest hen after chicks start pipping;
- coax birds to feed during a heavy rain;
- set hen until you are satisfied she is ready;
- get discouraged.

BE SURE TO—

- watch your step when working around birds;
- remove excessive food as it will sour;
- turn eggs once a day while holding them;
- watch for lice;
- dust hen with insect powder not later than a week before the eggs will hatch;
- safeguard the birds against predators;
- liberate your pheasants in suitable sections;
- change drinking water often;
- change your feeds gradually;
- feed game birds during the winter.

HATCHING AND REARING RECORD

All those who secure eggs from the Game Commission will be asked to submit the following report:

RINGNECK PHEASANT HATCHING AND REARING RECORD

IMPORTANT: RETURN REPORTS AS PROMPTLY
AS POSSIBLE

Report by
(Name) (Address)

Eggs hatched by
(Name) (Address)

Number of eggs received

Number of eggs set

Number of eggs hatched

Number of birds reared to releasing age

Number of birds released

On lands of
(Name) (Address)

County of Township of

Are such lands open to public hunting?

Number of birds not released

If all birds have not been released, state below your reasons for holding them, or when they will be released

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Other remarks and information of interest should be made on reverse side or by letter.

.....
(Signature)

Date 19.....

